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ABSTRACT

A quest for knowledge about the behavior and development of people in other parts of the world, concerns for social action, and greater family mobility have led to an increased interest in cross-cultural research. Male (N=112) and female (N=113) college students in India rated the desirability of 104 traits for Indian men or for Indian women. The traits included the 60 items on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) plus 44 items added to explore sex differences not covered by the BSRI, but significant to Indian culture. Similar data for the BSRI items in an American sample were compared to Indian results, revealing some cross-cultural similarities in sex roles, but fewer sex-role distinctions in the Indian sample, especially for traits related to assertiveness. Traits rated more desirable for Indian males suggested a pattern of entrepreneurial tendencies. Traits rated more desirable for Indian females suggested a pattern of expressive tendencies. Traits highly desirable in Indian society included those related to ability, interpersonal warmth, trustworthiness, interpersonal strength, motivation, and family orientation. The findings suggest a considerable overlap between traits related to gender in the American and Indian samples. (Author/NRB)

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A Comparison of Sex Role Stereotypes in India and the U.S.

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Running Head: Sex-Role Stereotypes in India and the U.S.

A Comparison of Sex Role Stereotypes in India and the U.S.

Until recently psychological research was limited primarily to the western world. A quest for basic knowledge about the behavior and development of people in other parts of the world, concern for social action, and greater family mobility have led to an increased interest in cross-cultural research. The sex roles of children and adults comprise one area of research that is currently of great interest and significance all over the world and has far-reaching implications for our academic, professional, economic, and social lives. Sex role is a very central facet of personality development. Reviews of cross-cultural research lead to two universal conclusions: all cultures distinguish between behaviors considered appropriate for males and females and the male role is more highly valued (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1979; Hyde & Rosenberg, 1980).

Differences between males and females appear early in life and continue to be reinforced and maintained through differential socializations of males and females (Hyde & Rosenberg, 1980). Generally speaking, in most cultures, males are expected to be more aggressive, assertive, and achievement oriented, while females are expected to be more nurturant, sensitive, and responsible (Whiting & Edwards, 1973). Sex-role distinctions are also evident in terms of occupations, with males more likely to be involved in pursuits requiring strength and technical skills, while women are more frequently engaged in tasks requiring skills in child-rearing, homemaking, and interpersonal relations (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1979). Children's games and toys, adult

hobbies and leisure time pursuits, language, and dress also reflect variability between the sexes (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

Besides certain apparently universal sex differences, societies vary in behaviors considered differentially appropriate for males and females. Mead's (1935) classic study of three New Guinea tribes, the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli, reveal strong support for cross-cultural variations. Certain societies allow a wide range of behaviors in each sex-role category; in some, both share particular roles equally, e.g., the Arapesh and the Mundugumor; whereas in others, though infrequent, a reversal of roles is evident, e.g., the Tchambuli. While in some societies, political and military authority and particular occupational roles (e.g., medicine) are reserved for males, these roles are also shared by females in other societies such as India, Israel, and Russia (Hyde & Rosenberg, 1980).

The diverse response patterns among individuals of varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds demonstrate the influence of cultural values and socialization in sex role behavior. Each culture has a set of institutional structures and practices to teach sex roles. Individuals learn to be male or female by learning effective means of communication and social behaviors which are required for their gender. Such culturally related sex-role behaviors are particularly apparent in certain Asian countries like India where religion, culture, and tradition have deep roots and have significant influence on the individual's personality and behavior. Parents, siblings, and other members of the extended family, along with cultural mores, have a significant role in the timing, techniques, and emphasis on sex role development and training (Nyrop, Benderly, Cover, Cutter, & Parker, 1975).

Studies of children and adults in Indian society have demonstrated sex differences in training and behavior. Minturn and Hitchcock (1963) report that the play behavior of Rajput children in India is based on observational learning. "Both sexes have their own type of fantasy play which is modeled on adult work. The little girls play at cooking and the boys at farming" (p. 334). In a study of reactions to frustration among Indian college students, Devi (1967) found that males respond with more overtly aggressive reactions, whereas females report more withdrawal and regressive reactions. Curently in India, personal observations suggest that industrialization and migration have brought about some obvious changes in stereotyped concepts of masculinity and femininity affecting such factors as household composition, residence patterns, sleeping arrangments, specific kinship relationships, and male and female attitudes and behavior (Nyrop et al., 1975; Zinkin, 1958).

It is the purpose of this study to investigate current sex role ascriptions in India. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) currently is used as a research tool for investigating sex roles in the U.S. The items on the BSRI were empirically derived based upon the theory that sex role is not a bipolar dimension (with masculinity and femininity at opposite extremes), but is two dimensional (Bem, 1974). People may be high in both masculine and feminine characteristics (androgynous), high on just one set of characteristics (masculine or feminine), or low in both (undifferentiated).

Item selection for the BSRI was based upon presenting a list of personality characteristics to two groups of judges. One group was told to rate each characteristic on the desirability of each trait for American males; the other group was given the same instructions, but

were told to rate the desirability of each trait for American females (e.g., "In American society how desirable is it for a man (woman) to be truthful?"). Items for the masculinity or femininity scales were selected if the two sets of desirability ratings were significantly different ($p < .05$) for both male and female judges. The Social Desirability scale is made up of items not related to gender. Twenty items were selected in this way for each scale (Bem, 1974). Research has demonstrated that the BSRI is useful (Bem, 1975) and valid (Bem, 1977; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976) for exploring sex roles based upon an individual's self-description in terms of society's definitions of differentially desirable traits in American males and females.

The present study partially replicates Bem's (1974) item selection study using subjects in India. In addition to the 60 items on the BSRI, 44 items were added by the authors to explore sex differences in areas not included in the BSRI, but items deemed to be significant personality traits in the culture being studied. It has been suggested (LeVine, 1970; Werner, 1979) that in any cross-cultural study, ethnographic information about the culture being studied is essential and helpful, both for anticipating distinctive dispositions and the interpretation of results. One of the authors is originally from India and is familiar with the culture. The 44 items were compiled by her based upon discussions with 10 Indian adult males and females in the Los Angeles area. These additional items tap power (e.g., powerful, submissive), family relationships (e.g., has strong family loyalty, feels obligation to family), and various personality traits (e.g., docile, religious, polite, protective).

Method

Subjects

Subjects were volunteer students at two major universities in Northern India with a mean age of 20.57 (SD = 2.97). Nine subjects were eliminated because of errors in filling out the questionnaire, leaving 225 subjects, 112 men and 113 women. All subjects were from the middle socio-economic class and were tested in groups in their classrooms.

Method

Subjects were informed that this is a study designed to investigate what traits are desirable for males and females in Indian society. Approximately one half of the male subjects and one half of the female subjects were asked to rate each of the personality characteristics on its desirability for men in Indian society. The remaining subjects were asked to rate each personality characteristic on its desirability for women in Indian society. For each characteristic subjects were to ask "Is it desirable for Indian men(women) to _____?" and give a rating from 1 to 7, where a rating of 1 meant the characteristic was not at all desirable and a rating of 7 meant the characteristic was extremely desirable. Ratings between 1 and 7 indicated intermediate levels of desirability; if subjects believed that a particular characteristic was moderately desirable in Indian men(women), they were asked to assign a number like 3, 4, or 5. When a subject did not understand a word or was unfamiliar with it, a clarification was provided by the investigator using dictionary definitions. All forms and instructions were done in English.

Results

Each of the 104 items on the questionnaire was analyzed using a two-way factorial ANOVA with Sex of Subject and Sex of Cue as independent variables. Effects were considered significant if $p < .05$. Based upon the main effect for Sex of Cue, each item was classified as "Male," "Female," or "Neutral," depending upon which sex, if either, was rated higher on the item. Relationships between American categories (Bem, 1974) and Indian categories for specific items are in Table 1. A chi-square test for independence relating Bem's categories to the Indian categories for Bem's 60 items was highly significant, $\chi^2(4) = 45.06$, $p < .001$.

Fifteen of the tests for interaction were significant at the .05 level. Each interaction was classified as ordinal if the rating trends among both sexes rank ordered the cued sexes in the same order, e.g., both sexes rated "competitive" higher for male than for female cues, but male subjects rated the male cue higher than did female subjects. Disordinal interactions occurred if the sexes' rating trends rank ordered the cued sexes differently and were of two types: each sex group rating itself higher and each sex group rating the other higher. Parenthetical material in Table 1 labels those variables with these interaction patterns.

Table 1 also provides for each item its grand mean (averaging across sex of cue and rater), as a measure of overall trait desirability in the Indian culture. Grand means ranged from 1.76 (uncooperative) to 6.38 (faithful) on a scale that could, theoretically, range from 1.0 to 7.0. The mean desirability rating for Indian male traits ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.08$) was not significantly different from the mean desirability rating

for Indian female traits (M = 4.53, SD = 1.17), t (39) = .40, n.s. Traits were classified as highly desirable (M > 5.5), desirable (3.5 < M < 5.49), or less desirable (M < 3.5). A chi-square test for independence of item desirability and classification category (male, female, or neutral) was not significant, $\chi^2(4) = 1.96$, n.s.

Discussion

Of the 104 traits, 41 (39%) had a main effect due to Sex of Cue and 63 (61%) did not. In addition, 41 of the 60 BSRI traits (68%) were in the same category in the American and Indian samples. Thus, for this set of traits, gender and cross-cultural similarity were the more common results.

Differences between the American and Indian sex roles may be attributed to differences in technology, economic base, religion, and cultural heritage. The many similarities are in spite of these factors and may be attributed to a common British influence, the parallel development of division of labor in prehistory, and an increasing western influence in India.

There is considerable overlap between traits considered related to gender in the American and Indian samples. Differences between the countries never reversed stereotypes, but did move items from gender-related to the neutral category. Nearly half of the BSRI's masculine and feminine items did not reveal significant gender differences in India. The largest agreement across countries was with respect to Bem's neutral items; all but two were also not gender related in India.

In both countries a number of traits are considered more desirable for the same gender. If we use Parson's (Parsons & Bales, 1955)

instrumental-expressive dichotomy, it appears that a number of traits related to instrumentality are more desirable in males and a number of traits related to expressiveness are more desirable in females. It is considered more desirable for men to act as leaders, to have leadership abilities, and to be aggressive, ambitious, competitive, dominant, and forceful. It is considered more desirable for women to be sensitive to the needs of others, tender, warm, eager to soothe hurt feelings, and affectionate. In addition, it is more desirable for women to be child-like, flatterable, and gullible, a trio of traits with a mean desirability rating of only 2.89.

Several interactions between Sex of Subject and Sex of Cue occurred. Since Bem (1974) analyzed her data using t-tests instead of ANOVA's, it is not clear if interactions would have been found in her data too. Bem classified a trait as gender-related if the t-test was significant for both male and female subjects, paralleling no interactions or ordinal interactions in the present study. Using this criterion, two of the male-related Indian items ("acts as a leader" and "forceful") would be omitted, so that cross-national agreement would hold true for 10 of Bem's 20 male items.

Bem (1974) classified an item as neutral if t-tests comparing male to female cues were not significant among male or female raters and if a t-test comparing male to female judges' ratings was not significant. This would compare to the present study's classification criterion using no interaction or ordinal interactions, plus the requirement that the main effect for Sex of Rater was not significant. Using these added criteria, the following items could no longer be considered neutral in the Indian sample: adaptable (female judges' ratings were higher),

secretive (male judges' ratings were higher), and the four items with disordinal interactions. For purposes of describing sex-role stereotypes, the classification of items based upon main effects seems more appropriate. Since Bem's goal was to create a measure of sex role from a large pool of potential items, her t-test strategy seems appropriate for her goals. She was more interested in large consistent differences than in using the most powerful analytical tool available.

Examining the items that are gender-related in the U.S., but not in India, it appears that it is equally desirable for Indians of both genders to have a number of traits related to assertiveness (assertive, defends own beliefs, individualistic, self-reliant, self-sufficient, and willing to take a stand). These assertive traits were all more desirable in males in the American sample. In the author's opinion most western observers would conclude that Indian women are not assertive. But Indians and some western observers familiar with the culture (e.g., Zinkin, 1958) have long recognized the subtle strength of Indian women in their interaction with men. The data support the conclusion that this assertiveness in women is as desirable as it is in men and that both men and women share this common attitude valuing assertiveness in all people.

Some of Bem's female traits related to expressiveness (compassionate, gentle, loves children, sympathetic, and understanding) were not gender related in India. In all, 44 traits were analyzed that were not on the BSRI. Among these items were several related to family ties and responsibilities. Of these none showed a gender difference. It appears to be equally desirable for Indian males and females to be family oriented, to feel obligations to the elderly and to the family, and to

have strong family loyalty. This is not surprising in a culture where children are highly valued, where family has greater importance than the individual, where the elderly have high social status within their families and society, where family relationships and obligations are highly valued (Nyrop et al., 1975), and where there are no government sponsored social security benefits or nursing homes.

It is significantly more desirable for Indian males to have traits such as adventurous, hard working, authoritarian and powerful. Tied with the other Indian male traits, a constellation that seems to be related to entrepreneurial tendencies occurs: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, competitive, dominant, forceful, has leadership abilities, independent, and willing to take risks.

It is more desirable for Indian women to be docile, domestic, generous, innocent, polite, religious, and submissive. This is in strong contrast to the entrepreneurial traits considered more desirable in Indian males. These stereotypes probably have a strong influence on career choice and domestic arrangements in Indian society. Nyrop et al. (1975) report that "in 1970/71 women science graduates numbered 48,000 of whom 60 percent were schoolteachers, compared with 25 percent of the male graduates. Only 100 of the 2,090 officers of the elite Indian Administrative Services (IAS) were women, although many more were employed in the lower ranks of government service. Of the 6,500 women enrolled in commerce colleges, most will seek jobs as accountants, clerks, bookkeepers or saleswomen" (p. 249). Thus Indian women, even those with higher education and technical training, gravitate toward service professions, while their male counterparts are more likely to develop careers involving technical or political leadership.

It has been concluded that in all cultures the male role is considered more important (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1979; Hyde & Rosenberg 1980). In terms of overall desirability, this was not true in our sample. Both genders had a range of traits including low and high desirability ratings and the tests comparing them were not significant. Although the genders had different roles, there is no evidence that one role is superior or more desirable than the other. Of course, it is possible that the desirability ratings obtained in the present study are not adequate indicators of social status. In addition, the distinction between attitude and behavior must be made; perhaps the Indian culture highly values a number of traits in both genders, but attributes higher status to a male displaying these traits. Mandelbaum (cited by Nyrop et al., 1975), summarizing attitudes toward family roles in Indian society, concludes that "their political ideology on this matter has commonly outpaced their family behavior" (p. 203), with traditional arranged marriages and marital relationships still common among educated Indians.

Items with high desirability ratings describe those traits that the Indian culture values, regardless of gender. Items with mean ratings of at least 5.5 appear to form six clusters of traits: Ability (intelligent, wise, and makes decisions easily, $\underline{M}$ = 6.15); Interpersonal Warmth (happy, cheerful, friendly, sincere, gentle, affectionate, sympathetic, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others, polite, warm, generous, considerate, soft spoken, tactful, and likable, $\underline{M}$ = 6.01); Trustworthiness (faithful, helpful, truthful, loyal, reliable, and protective, $\underline{M}$ = 6.50); Interpersonal Strength (strong personality and willing to take a stand, $\underline{M}$ = 5.92), Motivation (hardworking, competitive, and ambitious, $\underline{M}$ = 5.88); and Family Orientation (has strong family loyalty, feels obli-

gation to family, family oriented, and loves children, $\underline{M}$ = 5.79). While most of these highly desirable traits are gender-neutral in India, of the gender related items, those related to Interpersonal Warmth tend to be more desirable in women and those related to Motivation tend to be more desirable in men. Items related to Ability and Family Orientation are all gender neutral.

Gender and cross-cultural similarity are supported by the data. In contrast to American results, traits related to assertiveness and some traits related to expressiveness are not related to gender in India. In addition, in Indian males and females a number of traits related to ability and family orientation are equally highly desirable.

Data for this study were collected in northern India. Generalizing results to all of India may be questionable, especially in view of the fact that there is a tremendous diversity in India in language, religion, and customs. Historically, northern India has been more often invaded and influenced by other cultures, especially by Moslem societies.

There is need for further research of this type in other parts of India and in other cultures to clarify sex roles as they exist today. In addition, studies comparing immigrants in the U.S. to their native populations on their conceptions of sex roles would provide interesting information on the acculturation of immigrants toward American norms.

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Table 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AMERICAN AND INDIAN CATEGORIES AND MEAN DISIRABILITY RATINGS*

Indian Category	American Category: Male	Female	Neutral	None
Male	4.23 Acts as leader (D_S) 3.32 Aggressive 5.58 Ambitious 4.53 Athletic 5.77 Competitive (O) 4.01 Dominant 4.12 Forceful (D_S) 5.13 Has leadership abilities (O) 5.29 Independent 4.00 Masculine 6.02 Strong personality 5.32 Willing to take risks			5.25 Adventurous 3.13 Authoritarian 2.87 Boisterous 6.31 Hard working 5.14 Powerful 5.62 Protective (O) 2.91 Rigid
Female		6.09 Affectionate (O) 3.08 Childlike (O) 5.49 Eager to soothe hurt feelings 3.82 Feminine 2.77 Flatterable 2.81 Gullible 6.00 Sensitive to the needs of others 3.20 Shy 5.68 Soft-spoken 5.05 Tender (O) 5.66 Warm	5.66 Reliable 3.86 Secretive	4.52 Charismatic 4.03 Delicate (O) 3.24 Docile 4.68 Domestic 5.92 Generous 3.94 Innocent 6.03 Polite 4.77 Religious 3.29 Submissive
Neutral	4.95 Analytical 4.41 Assertive 3.97 Defends own beliefs (D_S) 4.16 Individualistic 5.83 Makes decisions easily 5.48 Self-reliant 5.38 Self-sufficient 5.82 Willing to take a stand	6.30 Cheerful 5.34 Compassionate 5.05 Does not use harsh language 6.32 Gentle 6.16 Loves children (D_O) 6.11 Loyal 6.06 Sympathetic 6.05 Understanding 4.33 Yielding	5.28 Adaptable 2.58 Conceited 4.87 Conscientious 3.58 Conventional (D_S) 6.20 Friendly 6.37 Happy 6.18 Helpful 1.90 Inefficient 2.04 Jealous 5.91 Likable 2.77 Moody 6.32 Sincere 4.53 Solemn	4.62 Altruistic 2.81 Chauvanistic (D_S) 3.04 Conservative (D_S) 5.68 Considerate 2.38 Cunning 5.39 Disciplinarian 2.71 Dogmatic 2.89 Egotistic 4.95 Enterprising 6.38 Faithful 5.62 Family oriented 5.46 Feels obligation to elderly

Table 1 (continued)

Indian Category	American Category			
	Male	Female	Neutral	None
Neutral (continued)			5.60 Tactful	5.63 Feels obligation to family
			3.06 Theatrical	
			6.03 Truthful	3.77 Frugal
			2.85 Unpredictable	5.43 Fun loving
			2.15 Unsystematic (D_S)	2.72 Gossipy
				5.76 Has strong family loyalty
				6.35 Intelligent
				2.23 Intolerant
				5.43 Modest
				4.21 Quiet
				3.88 Reserved
				4.27 Structured
				3.35 Subservient
				3.43 Talkative
				2.78 Timid
				1.76 Uncooperative
				6.26 Wise

*Parenthetical notes refer to significant interactions: O denotes an ordinal interaction, D_S denotes a disordinal interaction with the sexes rating themselves higher, D_O denotes a disordinal interaction with the sexes rating each other higher.